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## Dr. Uhlenhopp Reviews

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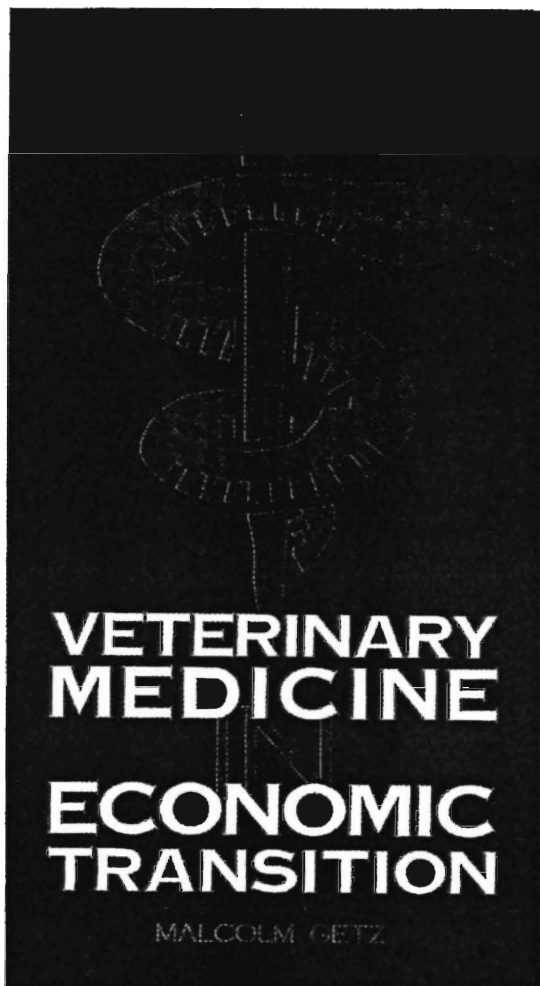
# Dr. Uhlenhopp Reviews

*Eldon K. Uhlenhopp, DVM, MS<sup>†</sup>*

This book is well written for the intended audience, and is highly recommended by the reviewer for reading by practicing veterinarians, veterinary students, veterinary educators, and state legislators. The author takes veterinary medicine from the warmth of the image of the Gentle Doctor to the cool impartiality of economic analysis. This treatment gives the reader an excellent grounding in the perspectives that someone without a veterinary bias might use in viewing the current economic status and the future of veterinary medicine in the United States. Historical changes in veterinary medicine and current trends of veterinary practice receive excellent coverage. The section subtitled "Prognosis" on pages 176-178 provides food for thought regarding influences and pressures on the profession.

The book is well organized into ten pertinent chapters: Overview, Supply, Demand, Incomes, The Practice, Geography, Agriculture, The Schools of Veterinary Medicine, The Market, and Policy. The content of these chapters is written with a logical flow and an easy to read style. The reader, however, needs to be prepared to interpret economic and statistical terms to grasp the full meaning and importance of the data presented. One must also understand the multiple potentials of the profession and the exceptional historic ability of the profession to adapt to societal needs to properly validate the conclusions drawn from the economic and statistical analyses. It is clear that the author has spent a great deal of time becoming familiar with the profession, however, the scope of this book remains tied to the traditional practice roles of veterinarians without being able to appreciate potential new roles coming from within the profession.

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*Veterinary Medicine in Economic Transition* by Malcolm Getz. Hardcover, 288 pp. ISU Press, Ames, Iowa 50014-8300. ISBN 0-8138-1814-1. 1997. Available through ISU Press, 2121 S. State Avenue, Ames, IA 50014-8300. \$44.95, price subject to change without notice.

Aside from the thesis of the book, which will be reviewed below, a number of other important concepts are provided. The discussions on "Rate of Return to veterinary medical education" and "the Supply/Demand Affect of Tuition" are brief but recommended reading for the professional curriculum veterinary student. The chapter on "The Schools of Veterinary Medicine" is similarly recommended. Two useful economic concepts; that

veterinary service is an "experience good", and that veterinary practice is impacted by "cluster competition" are presented. It should also be noted that the author devotes much time to extensive discussion of "super clinics" and the impact they may have on the economics of veterinary practice careers.

Attempting to predict the future of veterinary medicine, essentially from within the constraints of viewing the profession as a canine, feline, and agricultural production animal practitioner profession, the author formulates the following thesis. A lack of sustained demand for traditional veterinary service is coupled with a continuing surplus of veterinary graduates. The resulting oversupply of veterinarians leads to decreased incomes to veterinarians. In a free trade environment, this situation would result in fewer entrants into the field; however, since veterinary education is highly subsidized by state funding, colleges continue to fill their classes. The author contends that a necessary remedy is that either all veterinary schools need to decrease enrollments in a planned manner, or some veterinary schools need to be closed.

Very interesting and useful calculations are presented. Assuming that the schools and colleges of veterinary medicine continue to graduate approximately 2200 graduates per year, the author states that "if the rate of retirements and career shifts remain the same for the next three decades as it has for the last two, the number of veterinarians will crest in excess of 80,000 after the year 2015." Stating that "private practice in small animals has been the locus of growth for veterinary medicine," and that "the most important influence on the demand for veterinarians is the quantity of animals," the author then compares the growth projection for veterinarians through the year 2015 to "the likely change in demand for veterinarians indicated by growth patterns in the stocks of animals over time." These regression equations indicate a slight increase in need for feline practitioners, a steady state for equine practitioners, and essentially steady to soft needs for dairy, swine, and canine practitioners. Regression coefficients indicated that numbers of cattle (other than dairy), sheep, turkeys, broilers, and laying hens were found to be not significant in pre-

dicting state by state needs for veterinarians. These data lead the author to conclude that only 888 new veterinarians will be needed annually through the year 2015, with schools and colleges producing 1,336 excess graduates annually. This is considered to predict a rather economically bleak future until the supply of veterinarians, the rate of exit from active practice, and demand balance themselves somewhere between the year 2015 and 2020.

The author summarizes in the statement that "the incomes of veterinarians result from the interaction of demand and supply in the market place". This statement is arguably true; however, because of complexity of the issues, lack of sufficient data, and possible limited familiarity with the potentials of the profession, the author may not have sufficiently defined either supply, demand, or the market place for veterinarians. Insufficient treatment of the ability of a practice to market, the phenomenon of increased veterinary need in areas where high quality veterinary care has been cultivated and expected over time, and the concept of profit variability among various practice activities, is a shortcoming of the work. The author retains the concept that a practitioner lifetime is 35 years. This may certainly change. Gender shifts in the profession, trends toward partial employment, accessing an increasing percentage of the companion pet owners who do not currently utilize veterinary care, and addressing the geographic under-representation of veterinarians are examples of ways individual practitioners can change effective supply and demand without changing either the number of veterinarians or the number of animals. The effective market place can be altered by increasing the relevance of veterinary medicine to human health, creating expanded roles in global trade, and by becoming involved in future unknown/unforeseen opportunities. In short, the author has done an outstanding job of presenting one set of conclusions drawn from mathematical assessments based on clearly articulated assumptions. It is to the reader to determine the appropriateness of the assessments used, but more importantly, of the assumptions made and the underlying sources of vitality of the profession. ♦